



ABIDING IN CHRIST,
ABOUNDING IN HOPE

VOICES & VISIONS

FEBRUARY/MARCH 2007

SECTION B

LISTENING TO LEAD

How Discerning Leadership Empowers Leaders in the Church

By Rev. Kathy Clark

Leaders are called upon to make decisions all of the time. In fact, decision-making is one of the fundamental tasks of leadership. In most organizations, the ones charged with the responsibility of making decisions are the ones with the most power.

In the United Church of Christ, where we value diversity and inclusivity, we are attentive to who is privileged with making decisions and how those decisions are made. In some instances, decisions are made by vote; in others, by consensus. One model for decision making that has been a part of our Christian heritage since Biblical times is the process known as discernment.

Discernment is a buzzword that is used in many settings these days. Shoppers “discern” the best buy, teens “discern” what to wear to school, families “discern” where to take their next vacation.

It is unfortunate that the word has made it into popular usage without carrying with it its more substantial meaning.

Discernment is actually a deeply spiritual practice beyond deciding according to what one thinks is the best choice.

Discernment is about listening for the still-speaking God, relying on the power of God’s spirit to lead us in knowing how to make the best decisions in a given situation, according to God’s will, not our own.

Leaders who practice discernment are people who are passionately committed to listening for God’s desire. They are willing to follow what they believe God is calling them to do and to be. They are willing to enter into the process with humility, believing that their hearts and minds might be changed and others may have a perspective worth listening to. They are willing to let go of expected outcomes and practice openness to new ideas and the surprises that come from the Holy Spirit when one least expects them.

Discernment is a spiritual discipline practiced not just by individuals, but by individuals who are members of communities of faith. Discernment calls us to accountability, with God, to be sure, but also with our sisters and brothers in the Body of Christ.

How do we know if we have truly discerned God’s desire? Several criteria are listed in an excellent book on spiritual discernment, *Practicing Our Faith*, edited by Dorothy Bass:

- Fidelity to scripture and tradition: Is this decision consistent with the essence of the Scriptures and our faith traditions, as best we understand them?
- Fruit of the Spirit: Does this decision “bear fruit;” does it result in evidence of the fruits of God’s Spirit in our lives?
- Inner authority and peace: Does this decision feel right? Does it leave me/us with a nagging feeling or with a sense of serenity?
- Communal harmony: Has the decision led to an experience of harmony among participants, even if there is not unanimity?
- Enhancement rather than diminishment of life: Does this decision contribute to the overall health and well-being of the church and the individuals involved?

As members of the United Church of Christ, let us pray for all leaders in the words of Paul to the Philippians: And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ ... (Philippians 1:9-10 NASB).

Kathy Clark is the Director of Theology Among the People (TAP), a leadership development program of the Southeast Conference for lay ministers.

For more information about TAP, or to find a group near you, e-mail kclark@secucc.org or visit our website at www.secucc.org.



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“I WILL POUR OUT MY SPIRIT UPON ALL . . .
AND YOUR YOUNG SHALL SEE VISIONS AND
YOUR OLD SHALL DREAM DREAMS.”

ACTS 2:17

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Ministry, Churches and Changes from Generation to Generation

Dear Friends,

The occasion of my father's death last month has provided me time for reflection including thoughts about his ministry which began in 1945. Ray Downs was the organizing pastor of the Northminster Presbyterian Church, a United Presbyterian Church in Indianapolis. Within the first year, the congregation (located in a burgeoning suburb) had grown to 200 members. Throughout his ministry, the Presbyterian Church (as all mainline denominations) prospered and grew on the strength of the post-war baby boom. Sanctuaries were full and Sunday schools burst at the seams.

In contrast, I began ministry in 1974. All mainline denominations were beginning what has become a dramatic decline in numbers and prosperity. Each congregation I have served has diminished significantly from the halcyon days in the 1950s. Each has struggled with its identity and mission, and each has longed for those days two, three and four decades ago when the pews and classrooms were full.

These are really tales of two churches drive by different demographics, cultural contexts, and differing needs. One of the priorities of this Conference is to help our congregations acknowledge these different seasons in church history and to recognize that, in the words of the old hymn, "new occasions teach new duties, time makes ancient good uncouth." The missions and ministries to which we are called as congregations

today are very different from those of a church a generation ago. Therefore, the call on leadership skills differs.

Through the ministries of Kathy Clark and Cameron Trimble, we have begun to engage seminaries and others

Churches can no longer assume that by hanging out a sign people will throng through the doors.

who can be partners in educating clergy and lay leaders for ministry in

this new day. Today, the minister needs to be more than a teacher, preacher and pastor.

A good minister actively engages the questions of the identity mission of a particularly church, and helps it to develop a ministry around that mission and then mobilizes the gifts of its leadership to equip that ministry. Effective ministry reaches out actively inviting people into relationship with God and with this community of faith.

Churches can no longer assume that by hanging out a sign people will

throng through the doors. A strong church will insist on excellence in worship and music, knowing that it often has only one chance to reach a visitor. It will actively seek to equip its lay leadership as partners in ministry, and it will intentionally develop opportunities for members to find settings in small groups where they can develop relationships and grow in faith.

An effective UCC congregation will unapologetically will hold social justice, extravagant welcome and Christian unity at the core of its identity.

I believe that the congregations of the Southeast Conference that are flourishing spiritually are those who recognized these qualities of being communities gather in Christ's name and to serve Christ's purpose in the world. We are proud in this Conference to be available to you as you seek to be strengthened and equipped for the living of these days.

Peace,
Timothy C. Downs
Conference Minister

FROM THE
CONFERENCE
MINISTER



CONFERENCE NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

■ The Conference is pleased to announce that **Gwen Thomas**, a member of **Victory UCC**, has accepted the position of liaison between the Southeast Conference and the Coalition for GLBT Concerns of the UCC.

■ A budget hearing on the proposed 2007 budget for the Southeast Conference was held at 7 p.m. on Jan. 19 in the first floor meeting room in the building in which the Conference offices are located.

■ The Board of Directors of the Southeast Conference met Friday evening, Jan. 19, and Saturday morning, Jan. 20, in the first floor meeting room at 1330 West Peachtree Street in Atlanta.

■ The next **United Church of Christ History and Polity class** took place at **Candler School of Theology**, beginning Monday, Jan. 22, from 5 until 7 p.m. The class continues through April 23.

■ There are two mailings coming from the Conference office in January. The first is the Local Church Annual Report Forms, which was due back in the Conference Office on Feb 1. The second is a mailing with the final treasurer's report for 2006, a copy of the proposed 2007 budget for the Conference, and other stewardship interpretive information.

■ On Saturday afternoon, Jan. 20, following the Board of Directors meeting, the first gathering of the Stewardship Associates of the Southeast Conference met. The group promotes

stewardship awareness and development throughout the Conference.

■ There will be a winter youth retreat for the Southeast Conference youth in collaboration with the Southern Conference., Feb. 9-11. Need detail? Contact Kristin Vaughn at ski@pilgimageucc.org.

■ **Sandy Creek UCC** in Lafayette, Ala., was welcomed into the Conference on Dec. 10. The pastor of the congregation is **Wayde Washburn**.

■ **Church of the Savior UCC** in Knoxville, Tenn., proudly announced that two of their members, Sarah Scott and Bill Murrah, are receiving awards at the Knoxville King Week celebration. Jeremiah Wright, pastor of Trinity UCC of Chicago will be the keynoter for the occasion.

■ **Unity United Church of Christ** in Montgomery, Ala., announced that it has entered a lease to purchase agreement on a building, which they occupied Jan. 27, the day upon which they celebrated their reception into the UCC. The preacher for the occasion was **Julius Jefferson**, pastor of Heritage UCC in Baltimore and formerly pastor of Community Congregational UCC in LaGrange, Ga. The pastor of Unity United Church of Christ is **Bennie Liggins**.

For additional information on any articles or activities, contact Tim Downs at tdowns@secucc.org or call the conference office at (404) 607-1993, or outside the Atlanta area at (800) 807-1993.

Fisk University, Southeast Conference reaffirm historic relationship

In 1903 the American Missionary Association turned over to the First Congregational Church of Chattanooga, Tennessee the deed to their building. This deed had in it a restriction that the assets were to be devoted to building Congregationalism. Within the last two years First Congregational Church closed its doors and stated its wishes that the assets gained from the sale of their historic downtown building be given to Fisk University, a historical AMA institution.

Over the last several months, in conversations between the Southeast Conference and Fisk University, each party has sought to be faithful to the historic bond that we share. As this article is being written, a mutually affirmed agreement is being brought to the Board of Trustees of Fisk University stating that the money

from the sale of the property in Chattanooga be divided between Fisk University and the Southeast Conference as the successor to the American Missionary Association in the South, with 60% going to Fisk and 40% to the Southeast Conference for its continuing work in church development.

Tim Downs, Conference Minister, remarked, "We are proud to share a precious legacy with Fisk University, and we believe that this agreement is simply the beginning of a commitment to find other ways in which we can collaborate to around common missions." President Hazel O'Leary of Fisk University wrote at the conclusion of the conversations, "I look forward to finding ways Fisk and the Southeast Conference can work together in the future."

VOICES & VISIONS

Voices & Visions, the Southeast Conference United Church of Christ section of the United Church News (USPS 764-070) is published six times a year. Its mission is to promote current events and conference news, offering information and inspiration to members. Views expressed in editorials, letters, and signed columnists are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect official Conference or UCC policies.

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Carpenter Foundation Grants \$50,000 to Support UCC New Church Development

By J. Bennett Guess

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The E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation has granted \$50,000 to support the UCC's church development network, especially within the Southeastern United States. The region is proving promising for UCC growth.

The grant will be used to fund the first year of the UCC's Nehemiah Leadership Institute for New Church Development, according to the Rev. David Schoen of the UCC's Evangelism Ministry.

"This funding will support a cooperative program between the Southeast Conference, [UCC-related] Lancaster Theological Seminary, Candler School of Theology [at Emory University in Atlanta] and Local Church Ministries to train new church developers and coaches, as well as support the growing new church development network in Conferences and National Ministries," Schoen said in an e-mail announcing the foundation's support.

The first New Church Planter and Coach Training Institute is being planned for the week of August 12, 2007, at Candler School of Theology in Atlanta.

In April 2006, the board of directors of the UCC's Local Church Ministries — affirming that "now is the time for new church development" —



voted to endorse an ambitious strategy for planting and welcoming 250 new churches into the UCC by 2011 and as many as 1,600 new congregations by 2021. The evangelism plan has also been affirmed by the UCC's Council of Conference Ministers.

LCM also has earmarked \$200,000 for the Nehemiah Project, which calls for intensive church planting and outreach by the UCC in the Southeast.

The evangelism plan calls the UCC to embrace a four-fold strategy:

- 1) nurturing a church culture that embraces and engages in new church development;
- 2) creating systems that recognize, recruit, assess,

train and coach new church planters;

3) encouraging and empowering congregational multiplication [churches starting churches]; and

4) preparing for increased outreach and welcome of affiliating [already-existing] congregations.

"The Nehemiah Initiative is very big, not only for us [in the Southeast], but for the whole UCC," Southeast Conference Minister Timothy C. Downs told *United Church News* in April.

The E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation has long supported theological scholarship and conversation in faith communities about human sexuality and the inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons.

In 1995, the Carpenter Foundation granted \$2.5 million to UCC-related Vanderbilt University Divinity School in Nashville, Tenn., in support of the nation's first seminary-based program aimed at fostering deeper conversations about the intersection of religion, gender and sexuality.

In 1999, the Carpenter Foundation helped establish the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies at UCC-related Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, Calif., by underwriting the Center's first five years of operating expenses.

Information on the New Church Challenge Fund can be found at <http://www.ucc.org/evangelism/ncc.htm>

Concerns and Celebrations

■ We celebrate the installation of **Philip Price** as Interim Minister of Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta. The Service of Installation was held on Dec. 17, 2006.

■ **Ken Samuel**, Pastor and Founder of Victory United Church of Christ, celebrated the publication of his book by Pilgrim Press, *Solomon's Success: Four Essential Keys to Leadership*, with a book signing at the church on Dec. 16, 2006.

■ **Alan Roof** was ordained at a Service at Central Congregational UCC in Atlanta on Jan. 21 at 4 p.m. He is being called as Chaplain at the Shepherd Rehabilitation Hospital and is a member of Central Congregational UCC.

■ **Cameron Trimble** was installed as Associate Conference Minister for Church Development at the morning worship service at Pilgrimage UCC in Marietta, Ga., on Jan. 21.

■ **Tewana Lecounte** was granted a license to minister as pastor of Midway Congregational UCC in Midway, Ga., on Dec. 9. Her licensed ministry advisory will be **Dick Woodward**.

■ **Andy Sidden** was granted a license to minister as pastor of Garden of Grace UCC in Columbia, S.C., on Dec. 9.

■ **Gerri Ryons-Hudson**, Executive Administrator of the Conference celebrated her 50th birthday on Dec. 30!



■ **Linda Smith** was ordained into ministry on Jan. 7 at Central Congregational UCC in Atlanta. She was installed as teacher and chaplain in a four-way covenant that involved the Adult and Elder Center of the Nell Hodgson Woodruff School of Nursing of Emory University, the Georgia-South Carolina Association of the Southeast Conference, and Central Congregational UCC in Atlanta. Linda will be the United Church of Christ chaplain on the Campus of Emory University.

■ Congratulations to **Paige Pearson**, a member of Central Congregational UCC in Atlanta, and a hospice chaplain. Page married Knox Wimberly on Jan. 6. Following the wedding, they will be moving to

Florida. Paige was granted a leave of absence from ministry on Dec. 9.

■ Ray Downs, the father of Conference Minister **Rev. Tim Downs**, died on Dec. 13. A memorial service celebrating his life was held Dec. 17 at Central Congregational UCC in Atlanta, where he was a member. Tim wishes to express his deep appreciation for the many prayers and condolences which have been extended to him and his family.

■ We just received word that the father of **Andrew Kim**, co-pastor of Salim UCC in Roswell, Ga., passed away on Jan. 3 in California. We extend our condolences to Andrew.

■ **Graciela Flores**, a student in care of the Georgia-South Carolina Association and a member of Central Congregational UCC in Atlanta, will undergo surgery to have a cyst removed from a vocal chord on Jan. 25.

■ We congratulate **Kristin Vaughn**, associate minister at Pilgrimage UCC in Marietta, Ga., on the birth of her son, Jonathan Michael Vaughn, on Dec. 15. Jonathan weighed in at 6 pounds 10 ounces. Both mother and baby are fine.

For additional information on any articles or activities, contact Tim Downs at tdowns@secucc.org or call the conference office at (404) 607-1993, or outside the Atlanta area at (800) 807-1993.

UNBINDING THE GOSPEL THROUGH REAL-LIFE EVANGELISM

Author of Study Will Lead Convocation in Leadership Development

By Rev. Cameron Trimble

How do we invite others to church? Is there a template we can use? What if they say "no"? What if they say "yes"?

How do we create warm and welcoming churches committed to helping those who come become part of the community? How do we help more people connect with our amazing God of extravagant welcome and radical inclusively?

Martha Grace Reese, J.D., M.Div., has just finished directing the Mainline Evangelism Project, a study of the most effective evangelism in seven mainline denominations, including the United Church of Christ.

She did 1,000 interviews of pastor, church members, new Christians, studied statistics, and visited some of the most exciting and successful evangelistic congregations in the country.



Her book, *Unbinding the Gospel: Real Life Evangelism*, has grown out of the study.

Rev. Gay Reese will be offering a convocation on March 23-24, 2007 at the Conference office in Atlanta, open to both lay leaders and authorized ministers of the United Church of Christ. The event will run from 6 to 9 p.m. on Friday, March 23 and 9 a.m. until 2 p.m. on March 24.

During her time with us, Reese will share highlights of her findings and will help us begin to do effective evangelism in practical ways. Topics we will work with:

- Why do evangelism?
- What does evangelism look like in today's culture?
- How can we organize ourselves for evangelism?
- Who does what in an evangelistic church?

Reese will be available to answer your questions before and after the convocation. The cost for the workshop is \$100. You can register for by calling the Conference Office at (800) 807-1993 or by going to our website at www.secucc.org/development/leadtrain.php.

Our First Comma Connection!

Thanks to the vision and hard work of Rev. Linda Smith, our first Comma Connection is launching at Emory University this month. Comma Connections are an experimental ministry model being tested by the Southeast Conference. CCs are small spiritual communities focused on creating environments for authentic, intimate, meaningful spiritual connections to God and fellow sojourners through worship, discipleship and community service. While they are not churches in the traditional sense, they are designed to respond to vital spiritual needs from people not currently connected with the UCC with the hope that they either develop into UCC affiliated communities or birth into new churches.

Aimed at providing a UCC presence for students attending Emory University, Rev. Smith's Comma Connection hopes to gather students from across the campus for worship, discipleship through biblical study



and community engagement. To start her Comma Connection, Rev. Smith contacted the Episcopal House on the campus and asked to borrow their meeting space for Comma Connection gatherings. Because of the very gracious welcome of The Reverend Nancy Baxter, not only did they grant

Rev. Smith a place to meet, but they are also providing her with office space and the full use of the facility. "We are very grateful for the generosity of our Episcopal colleagues and are excited about the launch of our first Comma Connection. Rev. Smith is an outstanding leader and will provide great vision to this work," said Rev. Cameron Trimble, Associate Conference Minister of Church Development.

For more information about Comma Connections, see our website at www.secucc.org or contact Rev. Cameron Trimble in the Conference Office.

Southeast Conference Celebrates the Addition of Two More Congregations

On December 10th and again on January 27th the Southeast Conference officially welcomed two new congregations into the United Church of Christ. In December, Sandy Creek UCC in Lafayette, AL, was received in a worship service sponsored by the East Alabama-West Georgia Association and the Southeast Conference. In January, Unity United Church of Christ, in Montgomery, AL was welcomed into the UCC. In both instances the Associations had acted to accept the congregations at their fall meetings.

Sandy Creek UCC meets in the Allen Retreat Center building, and its members are drawn from churches that have left the United Church of Christ from across the East Alabama-West Georgia Association. Numbering over 15 members, they are off to a good start as our newest "new church." Their pastor is Rev. Wayde Washburn. Wayde has served a number of churches in the Association, including Jones Chapel UCC in Woodbury, GA and Elder Christian UCC in Dadeville. One member remarked following the service, "there is such a feeling of peace and love in this congregation, we are so glad to have

found one another". Sandy Creek UCC is in the process of becoming an Open and Affirming congregation.

Unity United Church of Christ has just occupied a building that recently housed a women's clothing store.

They entered into a lease purchase agreement and hope within short order to be able to purchase their building. The pastor of the congregation is Rev. Bennie Liggins, who served as the founding pastor of Community Congregational UCC in Montgomery for ten years before moving on to establish Unity. Bennie had also served as Associate Conference Minister for New Church Development and

Evangelism for almost 10 years. The preacher at Service of Reception on the 27th was Rev. Julius Jefferson, pastor of Heritage UCC, Baltimore, MD. Julius had served as an Associate Pastor with Bennie at Community Congregational UCC. Also participating in the service were pastors from Unitarian, Presbyterian, Baptist and Metropolitan Community Churches representing a broad ecumenical presence. Pastor Liggins lifted up these guests as a visible sign of the congregation's commitment to diversity and welcome.



CONFERENCE CALENDAR

Mark your calendars with events of importance to you and your congregation.

FEB. 1-3, 2007

Staff to New Church Development Convocation
Altadena, Calif.

FEB. 5, 2007

UCC History and Polity Class
Candler School of Theology in Atlanta

FEB. 7, 2007

Conference Staff Meeting
Conference Office

FEB. 12, 2007

UCC History and Polity Class
Candler School of Theology in Atlanta

FEB. 13-17, 2007

Annual UCC Consultation for Conference Ministers
UCC Headquarters, Cleveland

FEB. 19, 2007

UCC History and Polity Class
Candler School of Theology in Atlanta

FEB. 21, 2007

UCC History and Polity Class
(led by Conference Staff)
Evergreen Congregational UCC in Beachton, Ga.

FEB. 24, 2007

Georgia South Carolina Association Church and Ministry Committee Training
Clement Home in Atlanta

FEB. 25, 2007

Conference Minister Visit
First United Church UCC in Nashville

FEB. 26, 2007

UCC History and Polity Class
Candler School of Theology in Atlanta

FEB. 27, 2007

Conference New Church Development Advisory Committee
Conference Office in Atlanta

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